JFK assassination

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U.S. intelligence probed alleged Castro threats

WASHINGTON (AP) — Shortly before the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, U.S. officials secretly studied the possibility that Fidel Castro might retaliate against American leaders for their attacks on Cuba, according to informed sources.

Existence of the study was kept secret from the Warren Commission, which investigated the possibility of a Cuban connection in the Kennedy slaying, and, until recently, from the Senate intelligence committee.

Committee investigators came across documents relating to the study in the course of their probe into the performance of the CIA and the FBI before and after the Kennedy assassination, the sources said Thursday.

The panel's findings are expected to be made public within two weeks.

In an article to be published today, the New Republic says the team which performed the study was created by then-Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy. But the two sources told The Associated Press that although the attorney general was in over-all command of U.S. operations in Cuba, there is no evidence that he played a role in the workings of the group known as the "Cuban Coordinating Committee."

One source identified a member of the group as Desmond Fitzgerald, a CIA officer involved in a plot to kill Castro that was in progress on the same day President Kennedy was killed.

A second source said other members of the "Cuban Coordinating Committee" included John H. Crimmins, then a State Department Caribbean specialist who now is the U.S. ambassador to Brazil, and representatives of the FBI and Defense Department.

All members of the group were aware of the U.S.-supported commando raids against Cuba, but apparently only Fitzgerald knew about the assassination plot against Castro, sources said.

Existence of the group was first revealed last November in the intelligence committee's report on U.S. attempts to assassinate Castro.

The report described the group as an inter-agency panel established after the 1962 Cuban missile crisis "with responsibility for developing covert action proposals." The report didn't say anything about the group studying the possibility that Castro would strike back.

Two sources said it was not clear what had triggered the study of possible Cuban retaliation, but one source said the timing was consistent with the appearance in September 1963 of an AP dispatch which quoted Castro as saying, "U.S. leaders should think that if they are aiding terrorist plans to eliminate Cuban leaders, they themselves will not be safe."

The AP article has been prominently mentioned in speculation surrounding Lee Harvey Oswald's motive in killing Kennedy. The article appeared in the New Orleans Times-Picayune at a time when Oswald, known to be an avid newspaper reader, was living there.

The Warren Commission concluded that there was no evidence that Oswald was part of a foreign conspiracy.